

THE WHITE GYPSY.

A Tale of Mines and Miners,

BY J. MONK FOSTER.

Author of "A Pit Brow Lassie," "Slaves of Fate," "A Miner's Million," "Queen of the Factory," "A Crimson Fortune," "Passion's Aftermath," &c.

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CHAPTER XX.

NEWS FROM ABROAD.

Nearly three months had passed away since the White Gipsy had vanished so suddenly from Thorrell Moor, and the talk and wonder her disappearance had called forth had entirely subsided now.

Occasionally, Salome's name was still mentioned within the walls of the vicarage, where, for a brief period she had found such a pleasant and even happy home. Both the vicar and his sister uttered the girl's name in a tone which implied respect, for they had all along refrained from joining in the chorus of condemnation raised against the missing lass by Lady Carsland and others. Although the ex-pit brow girl had resided with the Mallisons for a few days only, she had won her way to their confidence and esteem, and when she vanished, and her flight was shown to be due to the fact that Sir Sydney Carsland's stolen jewels had been found in her possession, their surprise and sorrow may be imagined.

Had it been possible to defend Salome they would have done so willingly, eagerly; but in face of her running away their mouths were closed. "If she is not guilty why has she fled?" people said, and neither the kindly hearted parson nor his tender natured sister could tender a satisfactory answer to that ugly question. Still they refused to believe in her guilt, and told each other that there was a mistake somewhere—that Salome's hands were clean so far as the jewels were concerned, and that the whole truth would come out before very long.

At Carsland Hall the name of the White Gipsy was never uttered between the baronet and his wife. So elated had her ladyship been with the success of the scheme she had concocted to drive Salome Barrington from the neighborhood, that she openly levelled all sorts of charges and accusations against her.

She told her friends that there could be no doubt as to Miss Barrington's guilt. She must have known that the jewels were stolen, and in all probability was perfectly well acquainted with the whole of the mysterious history of the gems since the time they were taken.

But her ladyship was not satisfied with accusing Salome of being an accessory after the fact, but hinted in the broadest way that there was not even one redeeming feature about the girl. She insinuated that the White Gipsy was no better than a common adventuress who had inveigled Sir Sydney's ward into an engagement out of which he was desirous at all costs to escape, and in support of this statement she pointed out that Paul Meredith had gone away to South America and was not expected back for a long time.

This virulent gossip had the effect Lady Carsland intended it should have. Respectable people shook their heads gravely when Salome's name was mentioned in their presence, and even the poor folks among whom the White Gipsy had lived and labored were compelled to think she was a "very bad lot" indeed, seeing that everybody thought and said so.

It had cost Sir Sydney Carsland much annoyance and positive pain to listen to the tirades his wife was never tired of launching out at Salome. In the presence of others his mouth was sealed, but when he and Adelaide were alone he remonstrated with her and said that it was worse than cruel, after driving the girl away, to cast mud and stoness at one who was in all likelihood quite innocent.

That remark had brought a sharp retort from her ladyship; he had reiterated his observation, hot words had ensued from both and thus it had come about that the White Gipsy's name was never spoken by either man or wife in the other's hearing.

Seven weeks after Salome left Thorrell Moor a letter addressed to her had reached the vicarage, and as the envelope bore an American stamp and post mark the Mallisons could only come to the conclusion that the writer thereof was Paul Meredith.

At first the vicar and his sister did not know what course to take with regard to the missive; but after the lapse of a couple of days they decided to open it. They argued that the enclosure might contain the young traveler's address, and in that case they decided that they would write to him and let him know what had happened since he went away.

But on opening the communication they met with a disappointment. The missive was such an one as a fond lover might be expected to pen to the absent sweetheart to whom he was passionately attached. Every sentence of the long letter overflowed with love, and the eyes of Margaret Mallison were dim with moisture when she had mastered its contents.

The epistle went on to say that the writer and his companions had reached their destination in safety after a delightful voyage. He and they were at the time of writing, located at Para, at the mouth of the Amazons, and they intended next day to make the journey up the mighty stream so well described by Bates. Paul promised to write again before the beaten track of civilization was left behind entirely, but he did not, of course say how a letter was to find him in case Salome desired to write. He was in fact going beyond the world of the postman, and did not dream that anything had gone wrong with the one he loved at Thorrell Moor.

The result of the counsel the Mallisons took of each other after reading Paul's letter was that the vicar paid a hurried visit to Carsland Hall, to show Sir Sydney and Lady Carsland the letter intended for Salome.

He found them both at home, and was surprised to learn that Paul had written a brief note to his guardian, announcing the arrival of himself and his friends at Para, and of their projected journey the following day.

During the brief conversation that ensued, the baronet said they could do nothing but let matters go their own course. To write to Paul would be useless, as no letter could possibly overtake him, for before any communication could reach Para the party of travellers would be somewhere in that huge wilderness which forms the interior of the Brazilian Empire.

The vicar was already aware of that, and he said so, and so matters stood when one morning, some two months later, another letter reached Carsland

Hall. This epistle was addressed to Sir Sydney, and, as the baronet and his family were then residing in London—Parliament having reassembled—the letter was forwarded to him.

Sir Sydney, his wife and daughter were at lunch in their almost princely mansion in Park Lane when the letter from his ward was brought in by the well trained servant. He glanced at the outer envelope with an indifferent eye, for he saw that it came from Thorrell Moor, but his interest quickened somewhat when he came upon the enclosure when the foreign-looking stamp and his ward's hand writing upon it.

On tearing the second cover he discovered the following:

"MY DEAR SIR SYDNEY,—You will be astonished to hear that our trip is at an end, and that I am coming back home almost at once. The reason is sad enough. A week ago two of our party—poor Ernest Vivian and Francis Warrington caught the fever, so prevalent at certain seasons here, and I regret to say that dear old Vivian has succumbed to the disease. We buried him today, and the rest of us have made up our minds to go no further, but return at once—that is as soon as Warrington is well enough to undertake the journey down the Amazon."

"You will understand that we are all awfully upset by the poor fellow's death; and you will, therefore, excuse me for not writing you at greater length. But I thought it would be as well to let you know that I shall be back with you in a couple of months at the outside."

"I may add that I am not writing to either Salome or the Mallisons, and I shall be much obliged if you will not tell either of the three of my expected return. I want to give them all a great surprise, you know. Personally, I am in excellent health, and hope that you, Lady Carsland and Cordelia, are as fortunate."

"Yours affectionately,

"PAUL MEREDITH."

Sir Sydney's face had assumed a serious aspect by the time he had finished reading the letter. As he quietly folded it and was placing it in his pocket, his wife turned her quick eyes upon him and his grave countenance caused her to say:

"What is it, Sydney? Nothing serious I hope, dear."

"It is a letter from Paul," he answered, with the cloud still on his countenance.

"Is that all—there is nothing wrong with him?"

"Nothing; but he is coming back. You had better read the note."

As Lady Carsland took the sheet of paper from her husband, their daughter rose and, making some excuse left the room. Lunch was over, and Cordelia was quick enough indeed to see that her absence would be a relief to her parents at that moment.

"This is nothing," her ladyship exclaimed two minutes later. "I am glad he is coming home again so soon."

"Why glad?"

"Because I am satisfied that Paul repeats already of his engagement, and when he discovers that the girl was a thief—"

"She was no thief!" he said, sternly. "The accomplice then."

"Not even that."

"Well, at all events she fled rather than face the storm she had raised about her ears."

"You mean the storm you contrived to raise!"

"You are defending that girl again."

"I am only correcting your mistakes."

"Indeed. Well, she is gone, and Paul Meredith will not—cannot marry a woman with such a stained reputation."

"Paul is very singular, and there is no telling what he may not do!" he cried, a trifle sharply.

"I will manage that."

"You had better. I do not relish the idea of standing face to face with Paul Meredith when he learns that we drove Salome Barrington from the house in which he had placed her. It was a mean—a cowardly thing to do, and I am infernally sorry that I ever lent myself to it."

"It is too late now to say that."

"It is never too late to express regret for having done a cruel and dishonorable act," he said, bitterly, as he strode towards the door.

CHAPTER XXI.

PAUL HEARS THE NEWS.

It was a beautiful morning in mid-summer about an hour before noon. In the fields about Thorrell Moor the villagers were hard at work getting in the hay; through the green leafy depths of Cale Wood the sun shot long beams of warm yellow light; among the umbrageous timber, flowering bushes and rank grasses, birds flitted and piped; in the hamlet the bare-armed women were gossiping on the shady side of the street, near the grocery stores; while the great chimneys at the Carsland Collieries were shooting forth great pillars of smoke, which rose in a straight line skyward, for there was not a breath of a breeze abroad.

Along the high road which leads from the small station to the village a man came walking. He was brown-faced and handsome, and he swung along the dusty road at an easy pace, as if he were enjoying the dust and glare and felt at peace with all the world.

As he sauntered past the group of village dames he threw them a smile and a cheery "good morning, ladies," and when he was a dozen yards away one of the women cried suddenly, as if she had made a discovery:

"Ah! tell 'em 'ot, wimmen, that their 'ung chimp is 'im 'ot used to live at th' 'la' w' Sir Sydney. Ah can tell him in spite of 'is whiskers."

"Dost mean that their rich fellay as was goin' to wed th' White Gipsy?"

"Ay, 'im an nobuddy else. He went away 'ot a know, an' ah'll bet a shillin' that he's heard 'nother 'abeset wot the weech did, an' that hoo has run away."

"That's it, Peggy, sure enough, for sithes he's tekkin' through the vicarage gate!"

The women all watched Paul Meredith's figure until it vanished from their view, and then they entered with new zeal upon the fresh topic of gossip which the young fellow's unexpected reappearance in the village had supplied them with. Some of the women were of the opinion that Sir Sydney's ward would now go back to his old fancy and finish up by marrying Cordelia Carsland; but there were others of a more romantic nature who vowed that Paul would follow the White Gipsy, discover her, bring her back, prove her innocent of everything that had been said against her, and wind up the romance by making her his wife.

Quite unconscious of the deep inter-

est the gossips were taking in his affairs, and utterly oblivious of the startling intelligence in store for himself at the hands of the parson, and the reverend gentleman's sister, Paul Meredith sauntered along the avenue, casting his eyes hither and thither, as if he were either renewing his acquaintance with the spot, or was on the outlook for someone.

The young fellow's heart was throbbing with a gladness he had never experienced before bidding Salome farewell. Deeply as he had loved her then his affection had not passed into the state of adoration, which marked it at this moment. A few months absence from her side had intensified and strengthened his love for the lovely lass, and as he swung along the red drive which was barred at every stride by rays of sunlight and patches of shadow, he cut at the grass with his stick, cuffed at his light beard with his left hand, but thought of scarcely anything save the holy pleasure of meeting his sweetheart once more.

Presently, as Paul went towards the house, his keen eye caught sight of the vicar, who was seated on the big rustic seat under the wide-spreading elm on the edge of the lawn. Mr. Mallison was busy with the morning paper, and he never noticed Meredith's approach until Paul cried pleasantly:

"Good morning, Mr. Mallison. How are you? A magnificent morning, isn't it?"

"God bless me, is it you?" the vicar exclaimed, as he dropped the newspaper and stared at the other through his glasses. "When did you come back?"

"This morning only," Paul said, laughingly, as he held out his hand. The other took it quietly, and the young man added, "I thought I would not write, but would give you all a pleasant surprise. Of course, I wrote to Sir Sydney. Surely you are glad to see me, Mr. Mallison?" Paul questioned, for he thought the vicar's attitude towards him a little singular. "I know I have turned up before the stipulated time, but under the circumstance, I am justified, as I think you will admit when you hear all."

"You will pardon me, Mr. Meredith," the clergyman said, apologetically, "if my manner seemed strange. But I was not thinking of that at all. Have you seen the Carslands?"

"No, I came straight on here because I supposed they would be in London."

"They are. But have you not even been to the hall?"

"No. But I have walked from the station right on here. But where is Salome? Out, I daresay, somewhere. How is she getting along with her studies? All right, I know, for she is wonderfully intelligent. Give me an hour of her company, Mr. Mallison, and after that I will run away again for a year."

"Thus the light-hearted, happy lover ran on and the parson did not attempt to stop him. He had realized that Paul knew nothing as to Salome's disappearance and he was wondering in what way he should break the news."

"Have you heard nothing, Paul?" Mallison asked sympathetically, as he laid his lean white hand on the lad's shoulder.

"Heard nothing! What do you mean?" Meredith cried, with questioning eyes. "About Salome do you mean? What is wrong? Tell me! I can see there's something amiss."

"She has gone away."

"Gone away—when? Where? What for?"

Paul's face had suddenly blanched as he blurted forth those terse and pregnant inquiries, and the elder man answered:

"Sit down, calm yourself, my lad, and I will relate the whole of the miserable business so far as I know and understand it."

The muscles of Paul Meredith's mouth set themselves rigidly as he sank upon the wooden bench encircling the elm and prepared to listen to what his companion had to state.

"Shortly after you went away," the minister began, "a small parcel came to the vicarage addressed to Miss Barrington. It appears the parcel contained quite a collection of most valuable jewelry, some of which Salome wore occasionally. I and Margaret thought, of course, that the gems were a gift of yours, but it appears now that they were the proceeds of a robbery perpetrated on Sir Sydney Carsland many years ago."

"And Sir Sydney recognized the trinkets Salome wore?" Paul broke in.

"No; it was Lady Carsland who did so, and subsequently it came out that the whole of the jewels in Miss Barrington's possession—which were worth many thousands of pounds—were the identical jewels of which the baronet was robbed."

"I think I understand!" Paul said, lowly, but with a meaning in the words the other did not miss. "And this frightened her away?"

"I suppose so. She refused absolutely to reveal where the jewelry came from, and I believe Lady Carsland threatened to prosecute her unless she told. She gave up all the jewels at once, but refused in the most emphatic way to give the name of the man who presented them to her. To avoid prosecution she fled."

"Where did Salome go?"

"I cannot tell you—I knew nothing of all this till she disappeared. When she was missing one morning I went to the Hall and heard the whole story from the Carslands."

"You have never heard of Salome since?"

"Never, although I took it upon myself to advertise in the papers for her."

"Have you any idea where she would go?"

"None."

"Do you know of any friends Salome possessed in any part of the country?"

"Not a single one except those she used to live with at Marsh Green."

"Do you think they know where she is?"

"I do not think so. I have been to Mr. Hill's several times and it is not likely that she would be so greatly distressed if she knew where Miss Barrington was."

Paul rose.

"You are not going?"

"Yes; I must go. I will never rest until I have got to the bottom of this. God knows," the young man cried, solemnly, "that Salome is innocent, and I mean to prove it before I have done!"

"But you will stay to lunch?"

"I cannot. I must go. First of all I will call on Salome's old ladyship, and if she can tell me nothing I shall go and see the Carslands in London; they are there, I suppose?"

"They are."

"Then I shall go there and demand the whole truth from them. They never cared for Salome; they did all they could to turn me against her, and I am satisfied that they drove her away and covered her name with shame to prevent me from marrying her?"

"I firmly believe that she was innocent," Mr. Mallison said. She could not have known where the jewels came from or she would not have accepted them."

"Of that I feel certain!" Paul cried. "If I could only find Salome, I would snap my fingers at everything else. And I will find her, never fear."

"I hope you may, Meredith," was the parson's fervent response; "and when you discover anything you will let me

know. Good afternoon, if you will not stay."

Paul wrung the vicar's hand, and then went slowly back along the avenue, his serious countenance bearing striking evidence as to the change that had come over his dreams in the space of the last half hour.

It was Saturday evening, and Sir Sydney Carsland and his wife were entertaining a party at their home in Park Lane. The baronet was lounging in a corner of his extensive and sumptuously-furnished drawing-rooms, talking politics with an hon. member who sat on the contrary side of the house to himself, when an obsequious lackey entered and tendered a note.

"Who sent this?" Sir Sydney asked.

"Mr. Meredith, Sir Sydney."

"Tell him I will be with him shortly—take him to my private room, Benson," Carsland said quietly. His first impulse on hearing his ward's name had been to jump to his feet and emit a cry of astonishment, but he had suppressed his emotion and was now on the surface as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

Five minutes later guardian and ward met in a little, snug apartment, far away from the merry guests. Sir Sydney was attired in a faultless evening costume, while Paul was dressed in the light suit of tweed and gray dust-coat he had been wearing all day. The younger man seemed tired, even ill, was traveler strained also, and there was a look about him his guardian did not like.

"What a surprise this is, Paul," Sir Sydney exclaimed, holding out a hand which his ward preferred not to see, "I am simply astonished to see you here. How is it you did not send me word the moment you arrived in England?"

"I forgot to write to you," Paul answered, boldly, "because I was so eager to get back to Thorrell; and when I got there you know what I found. Will you tell me the whole truth respecting those jewels that were found in Salome's possession?"

"I can only tell you that the jewels were those which were stolen from me, and that Miss Barrington could not or would not say plainly how they came into her hands."

"And you threatened to prosecute her, knowing that she was to be my future wife?"

"I did not threaten her—nay, more, Paul, I never even believed her guilty," cried the baronet, warmly.

"Then why did you drive her away?"

"I did not do so."

"Who did?—I will know."

"Her ladyship did not look so leniently upon the matter as I was inclined to do, Paul. I was satisfied to recover the jewels, but she insisted upon knowing the name of the man who presented them to her."

"And you permitted her ladyship to threaten Salome with all sorts of pains and penalties, although you believed her innocent?"

"I remonstrated with her without avail, Paul, I assure you. Of course, no proceedings would have been taken."

"But Salome did not know that, and you drove her away. Lady Carsland—"

He paused suddenly, for the door had opened and her ladyship was standing in the apartment.

"What of me, Mr. Meredith?" she asked, coolly, as she walked forward.

"I think you were unnecessarily cruel and arbitrary in your dealings with Miss Barrington," he said sharply. "For my sake if not for her own you might have spared her all the shame and pain your charges and bitterness caused the woman I love and mean to marry in spite of everything."

"I was not bitter—I was only just," she replied, "and if I erred it was to save you from one whose character had been impeached. Would she have taken to flight had she not been guilty?"

"I cannot answer that, your ladyship, but she will when I find her—and I shall find her some day. Before I go I will say again in the most emphatic way that I consider that both of you have treated Salome disgracefully. I will now bid you good evening."

"Stay, Paul!" Sir Sydney cried. "Why are you going away? You will stay here, of course."

"Stay here!" the young man exclaimed, with a heat and a scornfulness he had never before displayed in their presence, "when she, to whom I solemnly pledged myself, body and soul, is cast out, and I know not what has become of her. No! I am going to find her if I can, and I may also discover something else. Good evening, Sir Sydney. Good evening, Lady Carsland."

Without another word he strode quickly from the place.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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